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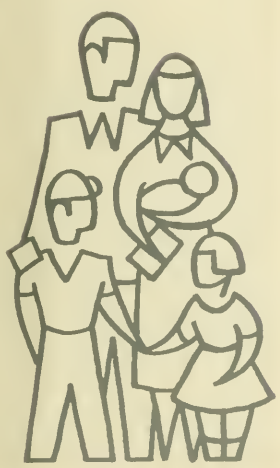
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parent  
education  
and the  
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sciences

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH FINDINGS AND  
POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PARENT EDUCATION

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parent  
education  
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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH FINDINGS AND  
POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PARENT EDUCATION

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summary of a conference jointly sponsored by the Institute of Child Development and Welfare, University of Minnesota, and the Children's Bureau

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**ARMIN GRAMS**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
Social Security Administration • Children's Bureau • 1960



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## Foreword

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For many years the Children's Bureau and the Institute of Child Development and Welfare of the University of Minnesota have worked together closely on parent education. In the course of this long association, members of both staffs have seen the need for better communication between the people who do research in human behavior and the people who apply scientific findings in their everyday contacts with children and families.

Because social change is now taking place so rapidly in our country, those who rear or help to rear children must often make decisions under circumstances in which it is hard to identify sound guiding principles. This is true partly because the supporting research is scattered, partly because some of it seems to be contradictory. Even when needed information is available, real difficulties often arise in connection with its use in interdisciplinary settings. Each science communicates in its own language, and it is not always easy to see how knowledge gained in one field may bear on problems identified in another.

As another step in the continuing effort to encourage a positive relationship between parent education and research, the Children's Bureau and the Institute of Child Development and Welfare brought together in Minneapolis, in August of 1958, a small group of research specialists. These men and women represented, informally, the sciences which contribute content to education for parenthood.

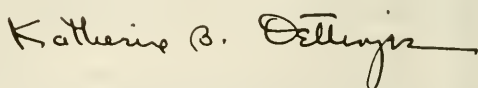
For 2½ days this conference dealt with searching questions, such as: How is parental behavior determined? Can it be modified? If so, by what means and under what conditions? The spontaneity and quality of the discussion were among its most telling aspects.

This report of the meeting was prepared by Armin Grams, associate professor of child development and parent education, University of Minnesota, with the assistance of Irving Sigel, chairman, research area, the Merrill-Palmer School, Detroit; Richard Q. Bell, National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md.; and Muriel W. Brown, parent education specialist, the Children's Bureau, Washington, D.C. Readers will find that the author has hit upon an ingenious

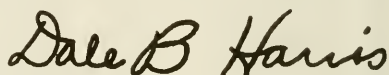
design for the organization of the material. Chiefly, this method highlights the themes which became the major issues of the conference and relates the ideas of the participants to each of these. For many students, the most interesting part of this summary will be the section listing suggested areas or problems for needed research.

It seemed important to concentrate, in this first meeting, on the concerns of scientists. For this reason, persons representing the organizations which include parent education among their services were not specifically included in this group. A followup program to actively involve members of all the interested professions and agencies is now under consideration. Cooperative projects can be planned, leading eventually to a conference in which cross-disciplinary groups can come to grips with such major problems as: What are the really basic issues in parent education in the United States today? What is already known about them? Where is this knowledge? What new knowledge is needed? Where is this new knowledge most likely to be found? How and by whom can it best be applied?

Although this report was originally intended primarily for members of the 1958 conference and persons immediately concerned with the followup of it, we now believe that its content should be made available to a wider audience. We realize that the project described is a modest contribution to the parent education movement in our country. If it helps to promote a more productive relationship between research in the behavioral sciences and practice in parent education, it will have served its purpose.



KATHERINE B. OETTINGER,  
*Chief, Children's Bureau.*



DALE B. HARRIS,  
*Director, Institute of Child Development and Welfare.*

## THE CONFERENCE

FOR MANY YEARS, staff members in colleges and universities, Federal, State, and community agencies, and private citizens have fostered programs of parent education. The content of these programs paralleled the advance of scientific study of the child and his interaction with his environment, while the method largely was adapted to the skills and facilities of the parent educators and the varying characteristics of their audiences. As a result of the burst of energy released in many child development research centers, sizeable quantities of information about children accumulated. In disseminating this material, the parent educator found a ready and eager audience. The emphasis was placed on publication and many varieties of communication media were pressed into service. As a result, parents in the United States are very well informed about scientific findings relating to children in their culture. And parent education remains loyal to the idea that a body of information about children exists which can be taught to parents with edifying results.

### Purpose and Plan

This conference emerges at a moment in time when parent education is looking to its own future. It was in no sense a moratorium or even a revival, but an attempt to evaluate the current scene and stake out the broad dimensions of its future activity. Research in child development and related sciences continues undiminished but the questions it seeks to answer are becoming increasingly complex.

The multidisciplinary literature about the child, his parents, community, and society challenges the interpretation of the most skilled professional workers, let alone the parent educator or even the parent. Further, studies of learning and the educative process have challenged some rather time-honored assumptions about the efficacy of certain teaching methods employed in parent education, notably the "lecture followed by discussion" type in which a discussion often does not materialize. Rather pointed criticisms, in many instances justified, have been leveled at current parent education programs. Critics have buttressed their remarks with pertinent research studies, albeit with some reluctance, for they are questioning procedures used not only in parent education, but in almost all education beyond the elementary school. This conference grew out of a need to review the situation with some objectivity, to strengthen the link between research and practice.

Still another reason prompted the cosponsors to arrange the conference. This was the increasing identification of parent education with preventive mental health. Two factors have led to the recognition of the real relationship which exists: The evidence of the importance of experiences during the developmental years to an individual's mental health and the emphasis in child psychology on wholesome personality development. The notion that parent behavior mightily affects the growing personality of the child is widely accepted. But how much do we actually know about parent behavior? Is there a real need for expert instruction and guidance? Can concepts related to mental health and personality development be taught? If so, how, and with what effect? The focus of the 1950 White House Conference made this a matter of national concern.

Parent education has an undeniable stake in our mental health endeavors, and this responsibility is felt by increasing numbers of people in the "helping" professions. Though only a limited number of people actually carry the title of "parent educator," their ranks are joined by new groups whose experience with human beings has led them to the conclusion that they have a share in this endeavor. The broader involvement of representatives of many disciplines which focus on people, and the realization that our quest for improved mental health has genuine urgency about it, combine to underscore the importance of considerations like those submitted to this conference.

## Major Issues Discussed

The final form of the conference agenda evolved through the cooperative efforts of the conference participants. Well in advance

of the conference dates, each participant received a tentative draft of the agenda to which he was expected to respond. He was free to modify, delete, or add material. The comments submitted formed the basis for the final agenda. Ultimately, the following outline emerged.

## I. Definition and Identification of Roles.

- A. Can parental behavior be given the formal conceptual status of a role? How consistent must behavior be to be classified as a role? Is the development of parental behavior phasic or continuous?
- B. If it can be conceived of as a role, what kind is it (i.e., functional, assigned, adopted, etc.)?

## II. Research Findings on the Determinants of Parental Behavior.

### A. Categories of determinants.

1. Intrapersonal—parent behavior as a function of the parent's unique personality needs and dynamics.
2. Interpersonal—parent behavior as a function of small group interaction; organization of authority (power structure) in the family; changing family experiences (family life cycle).
3. Community and cultural—parental behavior as a function of differences in social and cultural expectancy patterns resulting from social class stratification.

### B. Relative influence of these categories of determinants historically and today.

## III. Modification of Parent Behavior.

### A. In terms of what goals and values are roles or behavior to be changed?

### B. Kinds of modifications.

1. What is known about the effects upon the total personality of changing one aspect of it? Will modifications in the total personality occur in response to the teaching of specific practices?
2. What can parents learn, and what changes will result? (Content of learning.)

### C. Conditions which influence modifiability.

1. What is the relationship between the parent's perceived role (role conception) and his behavioral role?
2. Are we attempting to modify voluntary practices or involuntary expression of feelings? (Conscious and unconscious motivation.)
3. To what extent is vulnerability to modification a function of the emotional adjustment of the learner? (Maladjusted, guilty, inadequate parents versus well-adjusted ones who are eager to learn.)
4. Do opportunities for modification differ with sub-cultural and class variations? Does readiness for role modification vary with type of group (e.g., church, school, clinic)?
5. Can choice points, developmental stages, or crucial moments be identified in the developmental process at which parent behavior is especially subject to modification?

These questions constitute the major issues of the conference. It is clear from the report which follows that some were much more heavily treated than others, and that occasionally some additional questions were discussed. Generally, however, discussion was limited to the topics mentioned above and will be reported here in that order.

The reader will note that the issues posed above are predominantly conceptual and methodological ones with particular relevance to parent-child research. At first glance, the role of the educator appears to be underemphasized. This is true only of the agenda; the conference discussions frequently centered about the implications of the topic issues for parent education. In planning the conference, the cosponsors thought it better to define the issues in terms with which the research person is more conversant than in the language of the program people and practitioners. We hoped that the emerging discussions would have some genuine pertinence for parent education as such. We believe that the following record indicates that our hopes were realized.

## THE ROLE CONCEPT IN PARENTAL EDUCATION

THE PARTICIPANTS TOOK the position that parent education must be conceptualized in terms of the family and concepts used in family studies. One of the most important of these concepts is that of role. In the past, parent education has focused on the mother's role. The interest of fathers in parent education is much more recent and represents an alteration in their traditional role. This departure from the former conceptualization of the child-rearing task has occasioned some reformulation of parent-child research objectives and has strikingly complicated an already complex area. The concept of role was thought to represent one important "handle" by which this difficult area might be grasped.

### Problems of Definition and Identification

Whether or not parent behavior can be spoken of as a role is open to question since this term usually implies a relatively stable form of behavior which can be defined in terms of basic criteria, as well as a mutual expectancy or set for a particular form of behavior. It may be a valuable notion to employ, but too little study of role within the context of parental functioning makes generalizing about its present usefulness hazardous. Some attempts have been made to assign family roles, e.g., mother's role in caring for the infant, father's role in strenuous disciplinary measures, but family interaction is so fluid that rigid role description seems almost impossible. The question was raised whether given a transcript of the behavior in a family over an extended period of time, the definitions and criteria needed to assign behavior episodes to given roles are available and if they were, whether such assignment could be made from such a record.

A number of participants augmented the question before an answer was attempted. We were reminded to take into consideration the variety of reciprocally related roles exhibited more or less simultaneously by one person, e.g., wife, mother, homemaker, neighbor. To what extent will change in one role performance induce difficulties in the performance of other roles? The role of the parent in relation to other institutions in society, especially those which affect the child's development and purport to influence parental behavior, cannot be overlooked when cataloging this variety of roles. The difficulty of all this is compounded by the likelihood of both conscious and unconscious role adoption, the presence of all degrees of precise role prescription, and the varying readiness of young people to assume the parental role.

To accomplish the assignment of roles, one participant felt that it would be necessary to have not only a record of the behavior but also of the expectations which the individual has about how to behave in keeping with the prescription given by someone else. It was thought that a person would be performing a role whenever that set of expectations is the one which is most salient. Such a definition of role would make it literally impossible to take a behavior protocol and classify behavior into roles. According to this view, it would be necessary to have a protocol of the sequence of expectations of the person as he moves from role to role. This does not rule out the possibility of using the concept of role in research. It does require, however, that we determine what role expectations people have. It was mentioned that the "Parent Attitude Research Instrument" (17) contained items helpful in determining at least some such role expectations.

## Research on Role Modification

Several speakers alluded to the connection between all of this and parent education. The obvious attempt of the educator to get a mother, for example, to change her role is complicated by the fact that this change may be incompatible with the role expectancies of her husband. Often mothers complain that although they are eager to change certain child-rearing practices, their husbands resist change and generally are less available at times when parent educators ply their trade. Then, too, parent educators often have offered patterns of role behavior which are irreconcilable with the self image which the parent has derived by identification with others, his own parents, for example.

A compromise suggestion was made that we might substitute



the word "function" for "role" and thus avoid some of the knotty problems alluded to above. This would permit us to say that this person is acting thus and so, and describe it even though we were uncertain about why he was doing it or what he was thinking about as he did it. The term "role" proved a difficult one. The problem posed by its repeated use was more than semantic. It proved to be conceptual. Some maintained that all natural social behavior is in the context of some interpersonal relation and hence is some role. Spontaneity, it was suggested, is best understood as introducing into one role certain ideas from another or adapting certain role demands slightly so that they look new. Others believed the concept of "role" should be limited to behavior which is in accord with consciously perceived expectations. To them, to speak of all behavior as "role" was to render the term more vague and imprecise and to reduce its usefulness to science.

This idea was countered with the elaboration that it is not only the expectations of other persons which determine role behavior, but one's self-expectations as well. Role behavior is not quasi-neurotic or stereotyped, since parents do not give conscious thought to their behavior, intending for example, to be a father now, or to be a wife now, etc. Thus parent education becomes a process by which parents are made conscious of this set of expectations which regulates their behavior.

Our problem involves the source of role behavior. A role may be defined in terms of a response to expectancy largely at an unconscious level. Role transformation continually occurs in response to general socialization and experience, but this again deals with the underpinnings of behavior. But, as one participant put it, why we speak as we do may be irrelevant to the response others will make, so long as the object of conversation is to deal with a specific overt circumstance or problem. Translated into parent-child interaction terms, the role of the parent is to influence the child. The reasons which account for such behavior are many and varied and, as has been pointed out, may be unconscious. What happens in the specific situation is describable and could be called parental functioning.

But evidence concerning actual functioning is yet quite sparse and based on a somewhat questionable methodology. When we question parents directly about their child-rearing practices, we must assume that their answers are reliable, and that this is genuine evidence of performance and not simply responses geared to expectancies the respondent believes neighbors, the communities as such, or even the investigators have. In line with this, another participant reported that in one study using observational techniques, parent interaction with the child in the laboratory playroom correlated only negligibly with parent interaction with the child at home. The researchers

believed that the different situations make different demands and consequently the parent expresses himself differently (19).

Perhaps the role concept would be more helpful if we had data analogous to the job descriptions which are so much a part of our industrial economy. If we knew what behavioral acts constituted nurturance, dominance, or similar parent behavior complexes, and if we knew how these influenced children's adjustment, we would probably find the role concept a more useful tool. Of course, these are really two separate problems, of which only the first, defining the behavior patterns, really helps in role definition.

Reserving the concept of role for relatively continuous expectation and relatively continuous behavior might further help settle the somewhat muddy waters and yield a more workable idea. Perhaps we attempt to encompass far too much with the idea of "role." Perhaps the minutiae of behavior, characteristically idiosyncratic, are beyond the pale of orderly and rigorous classification and analysis. Are "roles" which change continuously, due to the appearance of countless exigencies, really "roles" at all? Some of the participants felt that the role concept could be applied to a substantial segment of behavior, but certainly not to all of it.

Although there was some talk of discarding the role concept entirely, others made suggestions similar to the above. The parental role is pictured as a gradual development emerging from experience of both the cognitive and affective variety. Perhaps parent education should be concerned with those aspects of performance which stem from cognitive bases. Most of the participants held firmly to the idea that large segments of human behavior stem from conscious choice making and that this links behavior directly with value systems. Role expectations bear a strong relationship to cultural values, and an understanding of the process by which individual parent behavior is modified by personal adoption and incorporation of value systems would contribute substantially to our concept of the development of the parental role. Because such understanding must grow out of careful study, it will be necessary to devise improved methods of identifying role behavior. Coding such behavior from careful protocols of family interaction is a formidable task, and, although a number of possible systems of classification and some appropriate categories were suggested, members were in marked disagreement about the feasibility of such a process, i.e., identifying and coding the behavior descriptions, and the bases from which necessary classifications and categories could be derived.

One word which persisted in the discussion of "role" was "consistent." If the lack of objections can be construed as a measure of agreement, then the idea was that roles, though not invariant and though embellished with occasional idiosyncratic behavioral digres-

sions, consist substantially in predictable, consistent responses to expectations. Members of a family learn to react the way they perceive their reaction is anticipated by those with whom they interact. Regardless of whether we assign the term "role" to it or not, there is a large segment of behavior involved in family interaction which is repetitive and can be predicted by family members with a high degree of accuracy. Perhaps these highly predictable patterns of behavior make possible such a thing as a family system; if relatively random behavior were to result whenever personal interaction occurred, the network simply could not maintain itself or be maintained. Thus members of the group felt that a carefully prepared protocol of family interaction would contain evidence of basic roles in the large segments of repetitive, predictable responses even though much idiosyncratic behavior would be found as well.

### III

## DETERMINANTS OF PARENTAL BEHAVIOR

ISOLATING THE BEHAVIOR of a parent which is properly "parental functioning" holds some rather exciting possibilities. The tangible, overt acts emerge, however, as a function not only of relational settings and role expectations but also of intrapersonal value and motivational systems. Consequently, isolation alone does not consummate the quest. Why do parents behave as they do? Is it possible to understand the process well enough to permit modifications if they are deemed necessary? Clinical literature repeatedly impresses us with the difficulty and complexity of such alterational processes. At the very outset of this discussion, the group was reminded of the plight of some parents who have "learned not to learn," that is, have developed sets that interfere with rational assessments of the requirements of a family situation.

Members of the group pointed out that it would be possible to distinguish between those parental acts which are duplicative, replications of an earlier honored pattern or of a current and popular one; those parental acts which are adaptive, representing an understanding of the development and needs of the child and an effort to meet such needs in an appropriate manner; and those which represent an attempt on the parent's part to meet his own personality needs. The fundamental distinction seemed to be between parental behavior as a learned technique and parental behavior as an attempt to apply fundamental principles. At this point, one participant stressed the idea that much more attention should be given the latter; that parents are already too "technique conscious." To this another promptly objected, indicating that in his opinion parents got too little help on the "technique" side. This divergence in viewpoint was not resolved at this point, and emerged periodically and significantly throughout the conference.

What appears to be a rather nice question is complicated by the

fact that the data to which we might appeal arise out of quite dissimilar types of experience. Much of the data on intrapersonal factors originates in the clinical literature, while observational and experimental methods have produced much of the information on interpersonal behavior.

## Conscious and Unconscious Motivation

Opinions vary regarding the effectiveness of parent education. Some hold that a large amount of parent behavior originates in conscious rational processes which are influenced by ideas and information transmitted via educational media. Others see so much of parent behavior rooted in unconscious processes that they place little or no stock in parent education whatever. Further study might distinguish those areas of child training which are more susceptible to educational direction than others due to a lesser degree of emotional involvement. At present there is little evidence on this point.

These considerations raise the question of sharply differentiating or dichotomizing education from therapy and conscious from unconscious. It was agreed to view these factors as continuous, not as mutually exclusive entities. One participant pointed out that such a conception does not alter the fact that much clinical data points to a great bulk of unconscious, repressed material in many people which renders them uneducable in the usual sense. In challenging this position, another participant questioned whether educational techniques could not effectively modify ego vigilance and perhaps eventually lift repression. Recently, Rowland (16) has raised the same question. Perhaps as we learn to change the social stigma value of a condition, role, or pattern of behavior, the manner in which it is perceived may change and it will no longer be as actively repressed. The impact of the Kinsey data was cited as an example of the influence which fact dissemination and reevaluation of social ideals can have. Whether, on the other hand, this actually alters behavior yet remains to be seen.

## Social Class

How do social class factors affect parent behavior, and what are the implications of such influence for parent education programs? Members of the group pointed out that the role of the parent may be more crucial in the behavior of the middle class child than in the

lower class child's behavior. Much of the "permissiveness" of lower class parents may really be neglect, and other than parental figures may be much more important in the socialization of these children. The suggestion is that in lower class settings parents may have less influence on children, and, since a basic parent education objective is to develop healthy child personality, the program may have to focus on public service or community service personnel who may be in a better position to influence these children. This point can be broadened by a consideration of cultural and national factors as well. Considerations like the above lead inevitably to the question of goals and objectives. Has parent education unconsciously adopted the values of its principal consumers—middle class mothers? Do lower class parents have greater difficulty appropriating the content of parent education because for them it represents an artificial performance, an act not quite in keeping with deeply rooted traditional behavior patterns which they are loathe to relinquish? A number of the conferees were quick to assert that if parent educators espouse middle class values, it is for the same reasons that educators generally do, and that there is no intent to superimpose a value system. As a matter of fact, the group suggested that parent education might progress more easily if it were more often built around the known parental strengths and aspirations in the particular group—the things parents hope and believe they want to have for their children.

## Family Group Dynamics

Parent educators need to remember that a father or a mother does not exist or behave in a vacuum. Some of the learnings intended for parents by parent educators cannot materialize and function in behavior simply because spouse or children will not allow it.

Similarly, we tend to forget that a family is also a small social group. Research on small groups, ranging from three onward in size, is being produced at a rate of 200 research studies a year (9). Some of the findings shed new light on the determinants of behavior in small groups like the family. Interesting effects of such variables as odd and even numbered groups, size of the group, and differentiation of leadership type, have been noted and require our consideration. Is it possible for parents of two children and parents of five children to behave in a similar manner? We do not know the answers involved here as yet, but the likelihood is that these structural determinants of behavior in the family may make quite impossible the rather uniform adoption of new behavior patterns advocated by some specialists. By the same logic, however, there may well be structural determinants

which could expedite the learning of new behavior patterns and child-rearing techniques. Such behavioral components were seen as important, and the conference participants urged that current research findings be scrutinized for applicable information and that more definitive research be launched in this area.

In some respects, this kind of research might be called descriptive or "limited objective" research. It is needed to supply hundreds of answers to relatively clean-cut problems which have genuine importance for parent education in spite of their rather mundane cast. A question like the one on the relationship of family size to parent behavior just discussed is a typical example of this sort of problem. Others are questions about what difference it makes in parent behavior whether a family is living within its budget or whether each month it goes farther into debt; whether a family lives in a house where everything is open and unobstructed or a house which is divided into regular rooms and affords greater privacy to its occupants; the number of square feet of living area per person in the family; the effect of siblings sleeping in the same room or separate rooms; and similar questions. Admittedly, we know little about these things, but we do not doubt that they are significant. Furthermore, these are things we can do something about. It's possible, of course, that research would demonstrate that these things are not important, but it seems foolish to overlook the opportunity to nail down a few of the more easily manipulated variables.

These considerations move us in the direction of adopting a broader conception of the targets or goals toward which parent education needs to be directed. We need to be concerned with a lot more than parents' feelings and attitudes. A mother with four children who has difficulty managing may need to love her children more, but it is more likely that she needs to learn some of the techniques which the nursery school teacher employs; she needs to be given new skills, new additions to her "bag of tricks." Parent education should concern itself also with even broader practical problems like family planning, space factors in home planning, budgeting, etc., insofar as these all focus on or affect parent-child interaction in the home. Education in matters like this ought not to preclude attention to attitudes and feelings. These, too, are influenced by education though perhaps with somewhat greater difficulty.

## Parent-Child Interaction

At this point one of the participants made the following statement: "To me, parent education is only meaningful as a means

of helping a parent to be a better parent, rather than a different parent." By this he implied a distinction between instrumental behavior and underlying determinants. Without undue disregard for motives and feelings, studies of influence techniques have suggested that what parents do, the overt behavior they display, has a predictable impact on their children (12) (21). In other words, regardless of the feelings underlying the act, it is the parent's act which produces a predictable result in the child's behavior.

But is it possible to separate the way a parent acts from the way he feels? Some observations and clinical experience suggest that behavior which is play acting, or ingenuine, is readily detected by children and often results in strong negative responses from the child. The problem is a sticky one, and for all of its importance has never been adequately resolved. The question is rather clear: Will the same behavior performed by parents differing in motivation have comparable results on the child? Will different behavior performed by parents having identical motivation result in different behavior in the child? The lines of opinion here are quite clearly drawn. There are those who hold that parent behavior is unrelated to child behavior; that it is the underlying attitude which counts. This point of view finds expression also in the idea that almost any child-rearing techniques with which the parent feels comfortable, which are appropriate to the parent's overall personality adjustment, can be effective and conducive to healthy personality development. The opposite attitude, that the overt parental act is the all-important variable, is held with about equal tenacity by other researchers. Some members felt that research was beginning to focus more intensely on this problem and that we might have some definitive answers in the near future. What empirical evidence is available seems to point to the relationship of overt parental behavior and child behavior. The participants were reminded that though these hard facts may be unpleasant they cannot be dismissed without investigation.

## Parental Education

### *Parental demands*

Even if it is true that parents are not aware of the influence they have upon their children in a specific sense, in more general terms parents, young parents especially, are seeking increased information today because they are convinced that the home environment has a significant effect upon the development of the child. These parents are ripe and eager for whatever information research can supply



about the relationship of specific factors and practices to maturing personality. This assumption, however, was questioned. Is there an increased demand for formal parent education? It is possible that while certain indications of interest, like correspondence from parents, may be declining, the increased availability of printed matter and the widespread programs under the auspices of local units of State and national organizations like the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the National Association for Mental Health may more than offset the decline.

A parent education program ought to be anchored in a social philosophy. We ought not to assume that there is a universal "best" way to rear children. The parent educator is to be a mediator between basic research and the parents, who, having decided on the direction they have in mind for their children, may use the information obtained to promote or assist in that type of development. It is assumed that the direction chosen by the parent will necessarily reflect, among other variables, social class, cultural or national differences. Parents, however, may not be aware of the role they play in all this. Many of them never get their major goals and objectives to conscious level so that they can map out any sort of course for themselves or their children. There is probably too little recognition of the significance which certain parental acts have for future personality development in children. At this point, it was asserted that we know very little about this anyway. Research here is desperately needed.

Members pointed out that the parent educator can hardly remain an objective disseminator of facts. We are interested in helping parents become better parents—in helping them develop healthier children. Whether we like it or not, what we say, or the way we say it, will have an influence and this implies a responsibility on our part. Today science is as potent a sanction with many people as theology and law, so that even the interpretation of research findings, when identified as scientific, carries real weight with the layman. There seems no way around the conclusion that we are perceived as "experts" and that, in spite of our best efforts to be noncommittal and to respect the integrity of parents' own values and attitudes, we are imposing a point of view which we believe merits attention and adoption by others.

An example of this may be found in the incompatibility of experts' pronouncements with the social and economic patterns that currently characterize the young adults of our Nation. Not long ago, rather strong pronouncements issued from a number of sources representing a variety of sanctions to the effect that we ought to reinstate the father as head of the household. But some of our research also shows that the father's declining influence in the family is not a matter of personal choice, but of economic necessity. A fairly large segment of young American fathers are "weekend" fathers, and in the little

time which they have to spend with their families they would rather be a friend and companion than law-giver and disciplinarian. When confronted with "expert" opinion about the role of father, they find themselves guilty and a bit fearful. They want to do what is best but they feel it is better in their particular situation to play a different role from that suggested by psychologists and sociologists. To do so without rather intense misgivings and considerable guilt is not easy.

Perhaps we should distinguish between kinds of information given to parents and the respective effects they can have. If we separate "first aid" advice from principles taught in the prospect of their longtime influence, we may reduce the hazard of parental misunderstanding and consequent confusion alluded to above. Parents are often required to act quickly to avert impending difficulty. They need to know what to do in certain emergencies, and frequently it is such occasions to which they refer when asking parent educators for help.

Recently, for example, some parents requested help in curbing and restricting the exuberant, exploratory tendencies of their 2-year-old. They were aware, of course, that 2-year-olds are active, inquisitive little explorers, but they wanted to know how they could protect this one from harm. He seemed utterly fearless and would expose himself to real danger by getting into almost anything, including the middle of a busy street nearby. It was evident that factors in their handling of him contributed to his unusually rash behavior and the parents were quite willing to endeavor over a period of time to correct these practices. In the meantime, however, their immediate concern focused on keeping him alive. Something had to be done and done quickly; in addition to broadened understanding, they came seeking "first aid."

This kind of "first aid" information certainly has its place, but a goal of parent education will be to make clear the distinction between such emergency techniques and long-range principles of child development and child rearing. Just as in medicine, first aid in this area can be harmful if it is not seen as a process of getting a situation under control, a means of preventing further harm from being done, or, briefly, if it is not seen as a temporary mechanism.

A note of caution was interjected. Research dealing with the effects of parent behavior on children's behavior will have to take up the stimulus problem first. To what aspects of the parent's behavior is the child responding? Several kinds of messages are transmitted in personal communication, and it is important for us to know to which of these the child's response is addressed. The words the parent employs are symbols, but the tone of voice and facial expression are signals which may speak to the child in a very different way. Unless

we are careful to untangle these variables, our research in this area is likely to be quite confused.

There was general agreement in the group that this was not only an interesting area for research, but an important one as well. But how important for parent education? Should we perhaps be more concerned with whether parents are taught general principles of child development from which they can derive appropriate means of coping with given situations? Such knowledge may permit greater flexibility in parent behavior, and these principles may be a more effective instrument in the hands of parents than specific overt behavioral techniques. One participant felt that a more fundamental consideration was whether or not some parents could be reached at all by means of parent education. Whether we attempt to teach principles of child development or specific influence techniques, we still wish to teach—we presume that parents can learn. How much do we know about the teachability of certain parents? Are the personality needs and structures of some parents such that they cannot learn any behavior that a parent educator might want them to use in relation to children?

### *Parental needs and expectations*

At this point some consideration of set, both in parents and children, ensued. The intention of the communicator is not necessarily carried out through communication techniques, so that it is quite possible in parent education for the parent to perceive the message in terms of his own personality needs rather than in accord with the actual intent of the message. Studies of client-set in the non-directive counseling process indicate that when the client adopts the view that it is up to him to do something about his problem, to explore the matter more fully, he perceives the counselor's remarks in a different manner. Interpretive statements and even suggestions, which, previous to the change of set would have fostered dependency, are now perceived as ideas to be manipulated and explored, rather than new rules to follow. It is suggested that the same thing is true of children. The set of the child, in the opinion of one participant, differentially affects his reaction to the remarks and behavior of the parent.

Many parents view parent education as "problem centered." They come prepared to ask about problems. The idea that parent education is concerned with the growth and development of normal children is, as yet, not very widespread. The "What do you do if-?" questions by far outnumber all others. Discussions dealing with discipline, toilet training, feeding problems, and aggressive behavior seem to be scheduled with far greater frequency than those which deal with questions like children's interests, books and music, play, games, and toys. One gets the impression that the world of the parent and the

child is largely one of problems and difficulties. Such a view of the child-rearing process creates a set or expectancy of which the parent educator must be aware.

Before the parent educator can communicate wisely, he must know what the needs of the parents are. But there is no one answer. The needs of parents are simultaneously unique and common. And group needs are unique as well, since they vary from group to group. We were reminded that some research is currently underway to determine how parents differ in child development information. More research on the characteristics and needs of parents is urgently needed.

One outstanding need which parents have is to appreciate the uniqueness of their children. Thus, parent education speaks not only to different kinds of parents but to parents of different kinds of children. This, of course, makes the job immensely complex and the communication problem enormous. Facts and information may be conveyed, but unless we provide actual training in the application of these ideas in the individual setting we risk the dilemma reported by other professional workers as well; namely, the gross misinterpretation of the ideas conveyed and the purpose intended.

The fact that parents have markedly different needs, and that the same parent, through time, manifests interest in different questions, poses a challenge for parent educators. It seems inconceivable that effective work could be done with parents by a leader who was unacquainted with these facts. The whole purpose of this discussion of determinants of parent behavior, particularly those aspects of the discussion which revolve around unique personality needs and dynamics, is to explore the feasibility of various programs of parent education involving leaders with differing amounts of understanding. At this point, the group emphasized the fact that, in any program of parent education, one of the very basic principles would be that the leader learn to know the different kinds of parents in the group, and that he recognize that their needs vary with the passage of time. Their own and their children's changing ages continually confront parents with new needs as well as new ways of perceiving old ones.

### *The use of normative information*

The desirability of child development literature which concentrates on age and sex norms and emphasizes irregularities in children was questioned. Since this information emanates from research in several disciplines, it can be confusing, may even be perceived contradictorily, unless some skilled interpreter relates the different pieces of evidence to the whole parent-child situation in some meaningful fashion. Possibly, too, much emphasis on norms and deviation may hinder the parent's thinking of children as unique individuals in their

own right. Naturally these remarks evoked considerable comment. But since we were talking about factors which influence the parent's behavior, some reference to "normative" material was unavoidable.

One participant challenged the assumption that the presentation of normative data on child development to parents is harmful or irrelevant to what they really want to know. Such information assures many parents that the course of their children's development is proceeding normally. This is especially important today, because young married people are very mobile and the family no longer includes representatives of three and four generations. Formerly older members in the family unit provided a perspective on the developmental course of the youngsters; they provided much of the reassurance that today's isolated parents seek and must find by recourse to experts in child development. Without such criteria, parents have no basis for prescribing the developmental role for the child. Perhaps we must distinguish between age norms *per se* and information about the developmental course through which youngsters proceed, albeit with considerable variation in schedule and rate. It is often assumed that the idea of age norms is likely to produce considerable anxiety when unsophisticated parents discover that their child does not appear to conform to the standards. This assumption, however, is based on our acquaintance with exceptional and spectacular instances. What we do not know is how many parents read this type of material without becoming anxious.

One factor which affects the kind of impact that various sorts of information have is the intelligence of the parents. To utilize imaginatively the data of developmental psychology requires generalization and abstraction. Even the leader who carefully stresses variability in discussing norms is likely to find that the abstract concept of variability is soon forgotten, but the concrete norms are remembered by all too many members of the group. To expect that large numbers of parents will think in terms of prediction and probability when they encounter normative materials is a bit unrealistic; but here the set of the parent educator too often interferes with his effective communication. Perhaps some parents' inability to deal in terms of variability and probability could be remedied by early and continued exposure to this kind of thinking. We recognize, however, that such an undertaking is by no means an easy one, and the results obtained can only be a matter of conjecture as yet.

Hovland's (13) studies on the effects of communicating different materials to groups of varying intelligence seem germane at this point. When issues were posed and discussion of pros and cons was encouraged, the effectiveness of the method declined with the level of intelligence of the participants. With individuals of lower intelligence, communication was more effective when a viewpoint was

presented. This suggests certain side effects which may well emerge in a careful study of the differential impact of normative data about child growth and development on parents.

### *Parental educability*

The role of the leader or "expert" in child development or parent education is complicated by certain popular attitudes. We hear that many people view child rearing as a public domain. Some insist that virtually anyone is knowledgeable here because this is a natural function. Others hold that all parents, for that matter all adults, were once children and were, to some extent anyway, successfully reared to adulthood. To such parents, the whole idea of parent education is ludicrous. Such attitudes are probably related to educational, class, and religious differences, and it seems vital that we recognize the relationship between the predominance of such views and the likelihood of educational impenetrability.

We moved into a discussion of class influence via reference to communicator influence. A number of penetrating studies reveal the general influence of social class factors on education (2) (3) (10) (23). Differences in value standards and attitudes characterize class differences, and grouping members of different classes for educational purposes is likely to result in problems of motivation, conceptualization, and communication. A marked class difference between leader and group, or teacher and pupils, influences the perception of the message. Other studies, like those of Hollingshead and his associates, indicate that social class factors also influence attitudes toward mental health and psychiatry (15). Schaffer and Myers (18) point out the difficulties which occur when a therapist from one class treats patients from another class. A similar difficulty may well operate in parent education. Certain stereotypes seem to be developing, differing from class to class, about people who tell others how to rear their children. If these stereotypes become widespread, they are likely to interfere with effective communication. Attitude toward the leader, even if his message is accurately perceived, may be a determinant of parent behavior which we cannot afford to overlook.

## IV

### MODIFICATION OF PARENTAL BEHAVIOR

THIS QUESTION SUBDIVIDES into at least two general areas. What kinds of goals does parent education have, and where do these originate? For the most part, the discussion centered about the first subdivision, although a number of statements concerning the second were also made.

#### Helping Parents Clarify Goals and Values

Interviews with some 350 parents revealed that, when parents are asked about their goals, they experience great difficulty answering (22). Many say that they don't know what objectives they have in life, more indicate that they haven't thought about it very much. The implication seems to be that parents need help in clarifying their own goals before they can be helped to achieve them. Parents are challenged by the question of goals and objectives, but they are not able to give many specific answers. They speak in terms of innocuous generalities, mostly in keeping with broad Judaeo-Christian ethics and democratic-mental health principles. Some participants felt that parent education should include the clarification of goals and values within its broader objectives. A few participants felt that such efforts should receive high priority from parent educators.

The thought is not, however, to make the articulation of goals mandatory in parent education. This, in itself, would be a subtle imposition of the parent educator's goals and values. Recent data, however, indicate that a great many parents are raising these questions. At this point, a further problem confronts us. Several participants suggested that it may not be possible to help parents clarify their goals as parents without getting involved with their goals as persons. For

example, a father may feel guilty because he spends so much time on his occupation and so little on being a father. But is he in a position to readjust his parental goal without some major rethinking of his economic, vocational, and social goals? The question of implementing this objective looms large for those parent educators who would give priority to the clarification of parent goals.

But there were those who expressed other opinions. Perhaps we ought not to judge the explicitness of parents' goals on the basis of their ability to articulate them. Value systems may indeed be operating within an individual, determining his behavior to no small extent, while he may be quite unable to express in so many words what these values are.

Then, too, even if such goals and values are clarified, does this help? Does goal orientation result in more effective and satisfying parenting? In the foregoing paragraph, we noted that behavior may be determined by values and goals. But there are long-range goals, intermediate goals, and immediate goals, and we need to know which of these exercises the greatest control. Long-range goals—those having to do with the meaning of life, the nature of man and his destiny—may actually have little to do with the overall course of parent-child interactional development as compared to the daily episodes which consume so much of the time of living within a family.

Such episodes, in which what the parent does is traceable to his desire to overcome a current hurdle, to solve an immediate pressing problem, are at times analogous to first aid. And yet, unless parents are able to get control of a critical situation and at least temporarily to diminish its urgency, there will be no time to consider what the long-range implication is, what principle is involved, and what further measures are appropriate.

Still another view was that long-range goals do operate, but they are implicit and not often, if ever, verbalized. Many of these values are adopted by parents from their parents with little or no critical evaluation. If a parent sees a child as a creature whose propensity is toward evil and who stands in constant need of curbing and correction, such a belief, though never verbalized, may influence a good portion of the parent's actions toward the child.

On the other hand, however, there is much in parent behavior that is incongruous. Often we see acts and techniques which belie even those segments of parental values which have been made explicit. Parents may profess love and affection and acceptance for the child but behave in a manner which reveals, especially to the child, quite another kind of evaluation of him.

One rather strong objection to parent educators being concerned with long-range goals, implied earlier, must now be dealt with at greater length. To posit the idea that clearly defined goals



operate in behavior requires the assumption of a rational theory of man. As we know, this assumption has been dubbed the "Jeffersonian fallacy." And yet, where are we without it?

This matter of different length goals has a parallel in our educational system. We know that the very young child is relatively unable to postpone gratification. He wants his rewards and satisfactions and he wants them "pronto." The first-grader is little enamored with the prospect of an illustrious college career as a reward for learning to read well. He wants to be in the "first reading group" or, at least, to have a little more fun and a little more praise because he can read. For him the goals must be concrete and the wise teacher knows it. But this does not mean that education does not stress long-range goals. Those responsible for writing curriculum do so with considerable perspective. As the learner grows older, he is directed increasingly toward a recognition of the long-range objectives, but he is kept alert and oriented by exams, promotions, honors, graduations, etc.

Parents learn parenthood gradually and, although as with first-graders the first objectives must be rather readily attainable, long-range goals can gradually be introduced so that future "immediate" behavior may increasingly reflect the overall objective as well as the exigency. Parents should be helped to clarify their goals and to obtain the information they need to attain the ends they seek. This is the kind of assistance which should enable them to bring up children who are autonomous and, to the greatest extent possible, rational—not creatures of impulse. Again we are reminded that parents are eager for help in answering the question, "What is it that we want for our child?" Thus to the question, "Whose values are to be clarified, the parent educator's or the parents'?" some of the participants would answer that it must be the parents' own values.

Beyond the matter of clarification, however, there is the question of implementation. Some see this as another major obligation for parent education. As child development research supplies more information about how to achieve certain goals in child rearing, the parent educator, in a sense, forces the parent to make a choice. We learn more and more about ways of achieving either value A or B, let us say, for example, high versus low achievement drive; now it is up to the parents to decide between the alternatives. They may not like their assignment, but it is an obligation they can hardly sidestep. If they do not do the one, they may well be bound to do the other. Such thinking is hard work, and many parents will resist it for that reason alone, if for no other. The tendency here is to turn to the expert, and the parent educator must be alert if he is to avoid a dependency relationship with the parent.

This view of the parent education process stresses the rational

orientation of the parent to his role and would increase the emphasis on problem-solving training in parent education. This view is quite legitimately the view of the *teacher*. But other participants felt very differently about this.

Rational processes are not always the best. Although this statement was challenged as sheer conjecture, the point made was that there are situations in child rearing where the more appropriate response is an affective one, and that the effectiveness of the parent-child relationship is increased when the emotional climate assists the development of appropriate affective responses. It seems better to conclude that the opposition is between conscious deliberation in child rearing and spontaneity and feeling, but that rationality does not necessarily pertain to one or to the other. We must avoid the temptation to deal with the issue of rationality versus emotionality as a dichotomy.

One participant spoke of "educated impulses." He stressed the importance of rational behavior, but in a slightly different context. Much of our social behavior is goal directed in the short-range sense. How can we get the right combination of feelings and ideas at this moment, in order to solve *this* problem? Perhaps it is at this level of action, the level of action with which people can deal, that parent education should operate. We will not be able to resolve this matter short of continued research efforts and findings.

### Change for Whose Benefit?

Most of the discussion up to this point testifies to the inviolability of parent values. Regardless of how vague and inexpressible these values may be, our part is to assist mothers and fathers to become more fully aware of the tasks they have set out to accomplish. Later, there was some disagreement on this idea.

Within such a framework, however, two other considerations can be identified. Do we assist the parent to clarify goals and values with regard to himself? We can direct parent education efforts toward the personality adjustment and mental health of the parent. The thought here would be that better adjusted parents will do a better job of child rearing. Or do we focus the parent's thinking on goals he has for the child and teach him how better to achieve these?

Comments were made to the effect that these two considerations are really one, but the preponderant concern seemed to be with the outcomes for the children. If anything, the view was that it is easier to improve the parent's effectiveness as a parent, that is, in his child-rearing behavior or role. This, in turn, however, must be seen as related to the parent's evaluation of himself as a person. To provide

for achievement in one area of the parent's life, to improve behavior in one role, should be rewarding and strengthening to the personality as a whole.

This matter was considered at some length. How do parents most effectively modify children's behavior in the light of the goals the parents have set for themselves? If this is largely a matter of overt behavioral acts, then we can concentrate more fully on the modifications to be achieved in the children. If this is more a matter of communicating attitudes and feelings, then we must concentrate much more on the personality adjustment of the parents. We are reminded, however, that even attitudes and feelings must be communicated through some observable physical change in the parent. Aside from the possibility of extrasensory perception, no means exist by which a child could detect an attitude or feeling in the parent except through its manifestation in the appearance or action of the parent. How the parent feels must result in something the parent shows or does, or there is no communication to the child. The "something" in the parent, however, may be very complex and very subtle, such as a slight flushing or a posture of which the parent is unaware. The complexity or subtlety of the behavior does not, however, place it in some special category that the child somehow perceives through other than ordinary channels. Thus, regardless of whether we place primary conceptual emphasis on attitudes and feelings or on less global concepts, the final common pathway for the study of either must be in the realm of behavior, broadly defined. But more of this, later in the report.

## Democracy in Parent Education

A discussion of parents' goals and values can get frightfully involved. These are questions involving the meaning of family life and commitment to such meaning. How much of this is within the province of parent education? If parents want to discuss personal values and goals as well as problems of family living and child rearing because they believe such matters are related, what does the parent educator do? He can say, "No, this is not our province. We cannot go into this because this is not parent education." But he cannot say this is not vital. There is, of course, a need for humility in terms of limits, for even the most highly trained leader is not qualified in all of these areas. And yet there are those who believe that parent education's scope embraces our whole society, and that its impact may be felt in many quarters in addition to parent-child relationships in the family. Perhaps it will be necessary to help parents see a need to

discuss the broader implications of these problems and encourage them to work toward a realignment of social ethics and objectives. At the same time, we must point out that since political, social, economic, moral, and religious problems are involved, the scope of the undertaking is certainly beyond the ken of any one person. Parent education can contribute to social reorganization and reformation, but it cannot be held responsible for it. All of this raises the question of just how isolated parent education is. It would be well to know how much the activities undertaken in the name of parent education bear fruit in other fields.

At this point, a question was raised regarding the extent to which parent educators can be truly "democratic." Is it always possible or even wise to accept the goals and objectives of the group? A parent educator, like any teacher, has personal convictions based on years of study and experience, which he is obligated to share with his students. He cannot simply stand by and moderate. On occasion, real wisdom is required. At that point, the parent educator must be prepared to behave in keeping with his perception of his role.

If he chooses to interject his views, he must realize that his words are likely to carry considerable weight. He now must cope with the problem of how much of this he can do without being guilty of "manipulating" parents. And to manipulate anyone—that is, to change someone else in a certain direction—is hardly democratic. Yet our schools do this all the time. They realize that certain values and standards are commonly agreed upon in a democracy, then try to build curricula to uphold these objectives, and evaluate their learners' progress in terms of these standards. If there are some who cannot be sympathetic to the values of the school, their right to differ is respected, but the program of public education continues unaltered.

It is possible, however, that parent education lacks a well articulated platform of values. We may be as confused as the people who seek our help. So much noise may be going on within us that we are deaf to the needs of the parents we serve. What are our values as professional people? Do we believe that certain child-rearing practices are *good* while others are *bad*? Can we say, "I believe that the facts demonstrate thus and so," or do we rather weakly offer, "Well, in my opinion," implying that ours is no better than theirs? One participant believed that we are not as confused about child rearing and family relationships as our audience is, but that we are often afraid to admit that we know what is right and what is good. Is this our way of sidestepping the commensurate responsibility?

As stated earlier, this problem can get very involved. We may not view parent education as "missionary work" or "manipulation" and yet it is probably time to recognize that we are likely to be involved in both these forms of activity. Every culture has selected and declared

certain goals and values by which people are to live, just as it explicitly evokes certain human potentialities and suppresses others. If we wish to continue our culture, someone must take the lead in transmitting these values and reformulating them as needed so that we can derive order and meaning from them for our lives.

This is a job which traditionally the church has done. Certainly this is one of the major roles of the church in the field of parent education. But other groups, also, including the parent education group and the mental health groups, are trying to do something for our cultural survival, to assure a measure of continuity for the way of life we treasure.

Again an important cautionary note is interjected. We agree that you cannot long deal with matters like this before becoming enmeshed in social philosophy, ethics, and religion. We agree also that leadership in these areas is desperately needed. It seems a bit inappropriate, however, for mental health workers and parent education leaders to assume such leadership for our society. It is appropriate for us to examine carefully the goals which exist and provide leadership so that a thorough reevaluation by society may take place.

One participant suggested one substantive value for which we might find strong consensus among both parent educators and research workers in this field. This is the belief in the efficacy of teaching parents and children that behavior is caused, that it does not appear "out of the blue," and that we must learn to look for determinants. This principle lies behind the work of Ojemann at Iowa and represents one possible exception to the general position advocated by the members of this group—the position that we should not teach values but rather assist parents and our society in understanding implicit goals, then provide further assistance in reaching them.

The parent educator, like the classroom teacher, must take his cue from the learner. We must begin where he is. We can respect his point of view and accept this as one point of departure. Our responsibility is not to coerce but to suggest. We may lay before the learner new insights and alternatives which may lead him to reevaluate his earlier position. In this way, the educator makes it possible for the learner to review developmentally his goals and objectives in line with sound scientific principles and current "best practice."

This issue is far from resolved. There was marked agreement, however, that parent educators are communicating values, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. A few examples of typical exchanges at a parent education meeting may help. In response to a value not shared by the leader:

Parent (during discussion of discipline): In a situation like that, I think a good spanking does the most good.

Parent educator (trying to suppress his bias): Does anyone else have another idea about this?

But in another instance :

Parent: I think we have to try to understand the needs of the child.

Parent educator: How can we go about this?

The tendency to direct the discussion toward a consideration of techniques and attitudes favored by the leader is rather obvious. At times, such influence is more subtle. On other occasions, even more direct. Is such behavior appropriate? Can we eliminate it entirely? If we can, ought we to? On questions such as these, the group could not achieve consensus.

## PARENT EDUCATION AND PERSONALITY CHANGE

WHETHER OR NOT THE TOTAL personality may be affected by changing one aspect of it proved to be a difficult question to discuss. Several participants volunteered that research dealing with the problem is sparse indeed. At first the discussion was slow and disjointed, but gradually the group focused increasingly on one or two issues. There was general agreement that parent education does not seek to change total personalities, that it would not if it could. Few, if any, parent education leaders are equipped for or would wish to undertake such a task.

This left the question of altering certain aspects of behavior, especially that involved in the person's function as a parent. Just how are these limited alterations best accomplished? With this, the discussion of altering instrumental behavior or altering feelings arose again.

### Implications of Different Approaches

Several participants strongly supported the view that only through what the parent actually does may attitudes and feelings become determiners of the child's overt responses (5) (20) (21). From this they conclude that parent educators can and should concern themselves with helping parents *do things* more effectively in the course of their relationships with their children. Parents can learn how to talk to children and how to play with them. Such new skills and understandings will alleviate some of the difficulties with which parents are confronted on the everyday scene. These participants suggest that the parent's orientation is in the present, not the future. What is it that he can do now?

To this query the parent educator can reply. Studies in child development have demonstrated that certain techniques are more effective than others. Practical endorsement of them is given by those who use them in group settings with children, particularly nursery- and elementary-school teachers. To learn to use such procedures with some degree of objectivity and emotional detachment does not seem an insuperable task for most parents. Advocates of this view are not impressed with the notion that "If you feel right, you act right." In fact, in the clinical literature there are many examples of individuals who are unable to express appropriately feelings which they have. These instrumental changes in parents are believed to result from rather straightforward didactic education rather than from an attempt to instill different attitudes and feelings in the parent.

Are the parents' attitudes and feelings unimportant in determining their behavior toward the child? On this point, there is inconsistent evidence which will be dealt with later. For the moment, the view is that much of what fathers and mothers do springs not solely or primarily from emotional roots but represents a response based upon a cognitive act, and as such is amenable to educational intervention and manipulation.

The argument was advanced that, at least in infants, studies support the idea that they perceive sounds and smells but not rejection and other complex, affective phenomena. Neither, however, is the infant restricted to conventional kinds of communication. He is likely to be sensitive to those things with which he is most immediately in contact. Consequently, we cannot be too sure that an osmotic-like communication process may not be taking place in the earliest stages of experience. This would, of course, have to take place through established sensory channels. As a toddler and thereafter, the youngster actually widens the gap between himself and his parents and thus is forced to adopt a more conventional way of communicating. He is then much more susceptible to the conventionally identified things the parent does. As an adolescent, he develops sophistication and begins to look behind the behavior of others and may become more responsive again to the emotional factors being communicated.

Out of this discussion, two rather interesting points developed. The first is just the reverse of the commonly held idea that feelings modify action; namely, that action results in changed outlooks and attitudes. If rejection is a problem, and rejection develops through the accumulation of incidents and episodes of specific behavior, then reducing the number of rejecting incidents by certain specific modifications, even in the physical environment, should have salutary effects. In addition to this, it is possible that feedback may occur. Small specific improvements result in a lessened number of tension- and hostility-producing incidents; these, in turn, perceived as satisfy-



ing by both parent and child, may be the start of a benign spiral which may eventually lead to some rather major changes in personality.

Two participants cited evidence to support this notion. In quite diverse studies, it was shown that when the attention of parents is directed toward their overt behavior—how negative they are, or how discourteous they are—they become conscious of the impact of their behavior and indicate that they acquire more positive feelings in the process.

The second point brought out here was that there probably are parameters within which this kind of work with parents, certain kinds of change in parents, is possible without upsetting genotypic characteristics of the parent. Beyond certain limits, or in the case of some individuals, there are inconsistencies between spouses in personality dynamics which make any alteration of behavior exceedingly difficult, if they do not actually prohibit changes entirely (21).

Moving away from the point of view developed so far, we are confronted with the idea that it is possible to effect some rather major modifications in individuals by giving them new insights into human relationships. Another participant underscored this point of view by referring to studies of generalization. Briefly, the idea here is to determine what aspirations and goals parents have for their children and provide them with new insights in the form of psychological and developmental principles. Such training may help parents to see not only what forms of behavior are appropriate in relation to such principles, but also to realize that many of the things they have been doing are actually self-defeating. One small study which relates to the phenomenon with which we are dealing indicates that when a group of students make a vocational decision, the choice is likely to lead to an extensive reorganization of thinking and some rather striking shifts in values. Perhaps under certain conditions, and given certain definitions, global modifications do occur.

If we look to the clinical literature, we find much to sober our thinking. There is some evidence that global modifications do not take place, but that the individual understands more fully the causes which underlie his behavioral adjustment. Modifying total behavior patterns is a sizeable job, and one participant seriously questioned whether parent education needs to get involved in global modification. Here we might refer to the individual, for example, whose life is essentially normal, except for one area in which he must employ neurotic mechanisms to cope adequately with a stressful setting.

The consensus seemed to be that parent education may seek to modify certain behavior patterns in parents with relative impunity. The chances of effecting broad-scale modifications of personality are indeed slight. But what assurance have we that even specific modifications are possible? When people have been thoroughly indoctri-

nated with certain beliefs, how do we go about promoting the unlearning of these ideas? Even a prolonged process like individual psychotherapy is often insufficient. We recognize a major need for research relating to unlearning and subsequent modification of behavior in adults.

## Developmental Factors in Change

One participant suggested that the question of personality changes in parents should include the consideration of change or modification through time. At this point, some consideration of the family life cycle seems relevant. The developmental cycles of the parents parallel the developmental cycle of the child, and modifications attempted must be considered in relation to the developmental changes continually taking place in both. Some parents are able to cope with the behavior of young children beautifully, but as parents of adolescents they may be at a distinct disadvantage. The relationship between a mother and infant is a relatively poor predictor of the relationship which will exist between them at a later date. All children are at first dependent, but have increasing need for independence as they develop. But some parents make the fulfillment of such a developing need quite simple; others make it very difficult. To predict what the future relationship between parent and child will be, we must predict from the data of a changing developmental interaction. Thus, attempts to alter the parent-child interaction must take into account the development of the interacting parties.

## Role Modification: A More Realistic Goal

Having agreed that parent education cannot and probably ought not to be concerned with global modification of personality, some members felt the question no longer had genuine pertinence. The discussion ameliorated the responsibility of parent educators somewhat; for whether they manipulate one small part of parent personality or attempt to effect global modification will bear a relationship to the degree to which they feel responsible for what outcomes may accrue.

Rephrasing the original question in terms of the degree of interdependence between roles evoked discussion of a number of additional problems. One of these was a consideration of the interdependence between the various roles a parent must play. To what extent is one role saturated with another? If we set out to change the

performance of a specific role, does this create alterations in the other roles the individual needs to play? For example, if a mother is persuaded to stop a certain type of discipline in the home, her relationship to her husband may become so conflicted and disturbed that she may become quite confused and inadequate in her role as a wife.

Role behavior in our society, especially the parental role, is not a closely, precisely prescribed set of behaviors. Our society permits a wide range of deviation in the playing of the mother role within what it would label satisfactory performance. Not only is there this wide range of tolerable behavior, but there are even ways of excusing poor role behavior in one area because of superior performance in a completely different role. A father may not relate well to his children, but he may be a first-class gentleman, he may hold a reputable position, he may be an outstanding citizen in the community. Because of his superior performance in these roles, his failures in the father role may well be overlooked. Therefore, though roles must intermesh somewhat, they are not so intricately interrelated that if one gets a bit out of kilter, the whole business collapses. At least the guess of one participant was that such a total breakdown would not occur, that it is quite possible to compartmentalize certain aspects of role behavior so that when change occurs in one, other aspects are little, if at all, influenced.

This has implications for the kind of parent education we can propose. A program which consists of parent group meetings, discussions, and distribution of literature is not aimed at, nor is this likely to modify, the total personality. This realization must limit our aim or goal. However, in accord with an earlier suggestion, there may be some spiraling, accumulative influence of a benign sort when certain practices (or certain aspects of a role) are changed and desirable results ensue. But such an accumulative effect is best regarded as a salutary bonus effect of a much more humble and limited endeavor. It seems that true parent education is this: Teaching large numbers of parents with the hope of helping them to modify certain aspects of their parental role performance but with no intention of remaking total personality. We believe that the basic personality patterns of the vast majority of parents are sufficiently sound to absorb and to incorporate effectively new behavior patterns in the area of child rearing with the same facility that characterizes their other learnings.

The next level of concern is for those parents whose basic personality has to be changed before even relatively minor adaptations are possible. Such parents are, of course, a relatively small proportion of the total group, but they are, nevertheless, important. Current studies of the effects that schizophrenic mothers have on their children are likely to demonstrate that these effects are pretty bad; but then

psychotic mothers are hardly within the province of parent education. Indeed, when we deal with psychotic individuals, we no longer call it education but psychotherapy. Leading parent educators recognize the limitations of the process of parent education and the futility of trying to reconstruct shattered personalities with standard educational techniques.

## Factors Affecting Readiness for Change

Parent educators need to consider the differences in educational level, family structure, social status, religious beliefs, and other pertinent variables, in the presentation of a parent education program. Research findings and experience indicate that failure to "tailor" materials and methods to the nature and needs of the group is to court disaster. The kind of organization within which the program is based seems to affect the expectancies of the group. Parent education in churches must be prepared to cope with religious issues as well as with the data of child development. School-based groups will frequently raise educational questions and slant discussions in that direction. Groups which differ markedly in social status and cultural variables are likely to have somewhat different expectancies and concerns motivating them to seek information and assistance through parent education programs.

The Puerto Rican groups in New York City are an example. If we attempt to bring to this group an educational program which ignores their religious beliefs, as well as some of the rather deep-seated, probably Spanish-derived and oriented values concerning the family, we may find it impossible to communicate with them and may lose the group in short order.

Social status and cultural differences must be considered if a parent education program is even to get off the ground. From sociology we learn that in the southern Negro family, the mother is the essential, pivotal figure in family behavior. Such a family structure requires parent educators who are sensitive and informed, who can adapt an educational program to the particular needs and characteristics of the learners. We know, from a number of studies, that certain kinds of social behavior are associated with differences in socioeconomic status.

Just what kinds of modifications people of varying backgrounds, in different walks of life, with a wide variety of philosophical outlooks, can and will accept is a relatively uncharted area. Does learning depend on different incentives and methods? What about

the ability to unlearn? Here are questions to which we need to devote considerable research effort.

One participant reported a parent-child research project which involved a predominantly working-class population of Polish extraction (native-born children with Polish-born parents). These people differed from a more Americanized (third- and fourth-generation American) middle-class parent group, not only in the handling of their children but also in their orientation or outlook on child rearing and the parent role. For one thing, many of these people saw little need for parent education. Some of them withheld the fact that they were involved in such a program from their friends, fearing they would be considered deviants. To attend parent education classes was to waste time, to enroll preschool children in nursery school was to waste money, both actions representing serious deviations from the point of view of the majority of this group. Their orientation involves the unanxious acceptance of certain "basics." For example, you do have to spank children. You lay down the law to a child and if he persists in disobedience, you "swat" him. Where parent educators frequently try to help "guilty" middle-class parents accept and be comfortable with the idea that they have found it necessary on occasions to spank their children, here such rationalizations would be utterly out of place and confusing, since within this working-class group's frame of reference such behavior is perfectly acceptable (21).

The foregoing discussion emphasizes the need for parent education to be concerned with the degree to which ethnic, cultural, educational, and other factors impinge on performance and attitudes and may abet or interfere with the educative process. It would be interesting and helpful to know more about the way important determinants of parent behavior are distributed among identifiable cultural or social groups. Such information would more readily make possible the "tailored" programs alluded to before. We need to know to what extent the behavior of parents in various groups is traditional, whatever the tradition may be. For, as one participant put it, before one is educated, he has to be aware of his tradition. What we already know about these matters is rather spotty. As a first step to improve this condition, the various scattered studies should be brought together, edited, and made available for parent education. But for many kinds of groups, there is literally no information available, and this gap must be closed by ensuing research.

What about the churches? Do members of various religious denominations differ significantly enough in their child-rearing practices and their attitudes toward self and others to warrant consideration in this regard? Studies show that when church members are given an opportunity to select, from 15 or 20 particular areas of life, the one with which they feel the church should be of greatest help to

them, they usually select the area of parent-child relationships. Most churches make quite explicit certain beliefs as well as attitudes about both parents and children, and for that matter, about the nature of people in general. These ideas must unavoidably have a bearing on the behavior of people, and, more specifically for our purposes, on the performance of the parent role. There remain, however, wide differences between churches in their emphasis on parent education. These differences in part reflect their different conceptions of the religious, moral, and spiritual development of children. Some groups place a good deal of emphasis on early indoctrination by means of relatively formal church-centered educational programs for children. These same groups have tended not to develop special family life education programs for young people, young and middle-aged adults, and older people, believing that where sturdy doctrinal foundations have been established, corporate worship is sufficient to maintain faith and direct practice. Research to date on this subject does not substantiate this claim.

Recognizing that the behavior of parents is a crucial factor in the moral and spiritual development of children, some churches are giving special attention to the needs of young parents. They are developing programs aimed at assisting them to make practical application of their religious beliefs in their relationships as husband and wife, as members of the community, and as parents. In this work, they are looking for professional help and are attempting to make the broadest possible application of whatever the expert contributes.

There are, of course, some church groups which scrutinize outsider's viewpoints with great care. These are, however, less likely to look outside their groups for help in the first place. They are also least likely to share in the progress which research in child development, the educative process, and parent-child relationships has made.

Gradually a body of information about denominational affiliation and parental behavior is emerging, although the relationships are by no means clear. Religious affiliation is involved with background, ethnic, status, national and racial factors, to mention but a few (14). It is impossible, for that matter, to lump the members of most denominations into any sort of homogeneous group with regard to child-rearing practices and attitudes. Differences between subgroups within a given religion, such as differences in ethnicity, may be greater than differences between religions. Other differences among members of the same denomination may be due to differences in degree of adherence. Still others may be due to differences between religions in the extent to which parents are able to apply articles of faith in everyday living.

An interesting sidenote was introduced at this time. A recent study of the adoption of new practices in the medical profession dem-

onstrated the influence which highly regarded or "star" members of the profession had. Once a prominent physician adopted the use of a new drug, the word got around quickly and soon its usage was accepted practice. A further finding was that drug salesmen were a more potent factor in the adoption of such a drug by the "star" than medical publications or attendance at medical society meetings. The implications of this for parent education are rather exciting. Perhaps it would be well for parent educators to study communication channels and prestige status within communities or other groups to see whether the adoption of superior child-rearing practices follows a similar pattern. Should this prove to be the case, it might be well to train groups of high-prestige individuals rather than go to already organized groups like PTA's or church groups.

Quite in keeping with these ideas was the report that parents, too, get most of their child-rearing information and practices from their peers (21). When a group of parents was asked to rank various sources of information which influenced them to modify their behavior, they ranked other parents and friends first; clergymen last. Psychologists and social workers were also at the bottom of the list, while nursery-school teachers were relatively high. The influence of their own parents varied with the type of group. Where ethnic and cultural ties are quite strong and young people are less mobile, parental influence is greater. But where the young adults are more mobile, their parents are not only not as available, but separation encourages a prevailing tendency not to seek their advice. For many of these young people, parents seem to symbolize that which they are seeking to divorce from their life; their quest after personal independence seems to preclude taking advice from and adopting the practices of the preceding generation.

Parent education seeks to modify parent behavior. We have discussed many aspects of this problem and tried to demonstrate what research has to offer to its effective solution as well as what yet remains for research to do. The present question, like all the others, grows out of the implications of a few scattered studies and looks to further work for its ultimate resolution. Are there teachable moments in the course of parents' lives? By this we mean points in time when parents are more amenable to influence. If we consider this from the viewpoint of accessibility, some research would indicate that the pre-natal period is as good as any in this regard. With the exception of a few States where a fair percentage of deliveries are by midwives, most people make use of hospitals for maternity care. Thus some would contend that maternity services can provide ready access to a large proportion of the parent population at an optimal moment psychologically.

There are a number of parallels here. We seek to discover

optimal moments for other kinds of learnings. We speak of readiness to learn to read and write; can we not speak of readiness to learn to be a parent? Premarital counseling with engaged couples takes on a very different complexion than that found in high school courses in preparation for marriage. Classes for expectant parents have proven highly successful, devoted as they are to problems which have special, temporal significance. The same thing seems to be true of parents. Problems of child rearing seem terribly remote until one is confronted with them.

The experience of most parent educators is that newer, younger parents show greater interest in learning about parenting than parents of older children. It is apparent that some developmental changes occur in a parent's child-rearing practices, but just what these are or the course they follow is largely unknown. The idea of the development of *parent* personality through time is an interesting speculation, but at present we have neither descriptive data nor even tenable hypotheses. One participant reported that a cursory check of the psychoanalytic literature indicated that only Erikson (6), Benedek (1), and Deutsch (4), have attempted to deal with the development of parental behavior. These efforts are quite fragmentary at the present. This problem is ripe for theoretical work, and although academic developmental psychology is not distinguished for its theoretical contribution, it might do well to encourage further activity in this area.

Havighurst's concept of developmental tasks and Erikson's basic stages of personality development require that we consider the total life cycle of individuals who ultimately become parents. How early teachable moments which have pertinence for parental behavior occur, we simply do not know. Some writers have suggested that transitional objects in early childhood (around the age of 1½ or 2) are the precursors of parental behavior (24). Freud (8) saw parental behavior as a manifestation of narcissism. It may be that the origins of parental behavior are the early self-care systems by which the child fantasies and works through caring for himself in the absence of the parent figure.

A total life-cycle approach introduces numerous complexities, some of which have been alluded to earlier. The staggering number of potentially relevant incidents all but precludes any attempt to sort out those which have genuine pertinence. The idea that parental behavior is already, in part, determined by early childhood experiences and that such behavior evolves out of a lifelong gradual and cumulative process forces us to postulate that a major portion of the parent's role performance stems from experiences long forgotten. Opinions vary greatly regarding both the degree of unconscious motivation underlying parent behavior and the extent to which the unconscious



is subject to modification via educational processes. By now it should be clear why some professional workers espouse a more parsimonious view, viewing the development of parent behavior as temporally congruent with the years spanned by their children's development.

It may be helpful to think of parent personality development as the continuous acquisition and discarding of expectancies as to how the child should behave as well as the continual revision of patterns of parent behavior. The question which then follows is whether certain crucial points can be isolated at which parent education may be most fruitfully applied. Some crucial periods have been described for children and adolescents; it may well be that these are equally critical for parents. The period of infancy, the beginnings of independence, entrance into school, and the pubertal age may represent periods of maximal readiness in parents to cope with the challenge of child rearing and avail themselves of whatever assistance parent educators can offer.

This matter is far from settled. In spite of the obvious difficulties which the life-cycle view presents, several of the participants cited both experimental and clinical evidence which cannot be easily dismissed. Recent research with animals has demonstrated that lack of opportunity to practice certain behaviors results in inability to perform a similar function when the animal becomes a parent. The report of the third meeting of the World Health Organization Study Group on the Psychobiological Development of the Child contains a rather extended discussion of stages in human development which seem to have considerable significance for the way the adult fulfills his roles later on. In addition to these experimental findings, several participants reminded the conference that the clinical literature is replete with references to the importance of early childhood experiences for later behavior and adjustment.

One participant proposed something of a compromise. Human development is an ongoing process and it is difficult to conceive of any stage in a continuing process in total isolation from all other stages. To what then shall significance be attached? The historian faces this problem continually, since the causes of an event may stretch back over many years—even many centuries. But the possibility that an occurrence may have important causal significance decreases as the time lapse between it and the phenomenon under scrutiny increases. The law of finite causation is still fundamental in science. To posit everything as a cause of anything is to risk intellectual chaos. In the light of this, we might propose that although early childhood experiences and learnings are of some significance to parent behavior, the significance of events and learnings increases as they become more nearly contemporaneous with a person's present mode of behaving. Perhaps it would be well to return to our earlier distinction between

underlying attitudes and conceptualizations and overt techniques of child rearing. The previous life history of the parent is the time in which fundamental attitudes and ways of thinking are formed. Such rather general learnings may have important applications at many points in the life cycle and permit generalization to many quite specific problems as they arise. Detailed learnings having to do with feeding, toilet training, aggression, play materials, and the like are probably best accomplished when some degree of urgency is felt. Thus, our view of parent education and the decisions we make about its content are linked to the question of choice points in development.

Those who think of parent education as the dissemination of a substantive body of information about children which has intrinsic interest in its own right and also will be helpful to parents as they face the normal range of difficulties encountered in child rearing will focus primarily on the parent as a parent. Such a definition also prescribes the kinds of materials which will be discussed. Infancy, toddlerhood, the preschool years, and the early school years are of most concern to parents and they want information focused upon the major problem in these areas. They are probably as ripe for instruction at these moments as they ever will be. Those who are church members are susceptible also at moments of outstanding significance in the ritual of their belief. Baptism, child dedication, circumcision, confirmation, Bar Mitzvah are but a few among the many occasions at which the rituals of the churches provide opportunities for parent education. Again, these are the more teachable moments.

Those, on the other hand, who emphasize the importance of social and emotional adjustment look to points in the preparental life of individuals for effecting salutary modifications which are believed to have long-range significance. According to this point of view, parents need to deal intelligently with children not only because the children stand to benefit as children, but also because such treatment is a way of assuring that these children will someday do an adequate or even superior job of child rearing themselves. Though the participants were clearly divided regarding the comparative importance of these two views, they were unanimous in their recommendation that further research is necessary at two levels before the issues can truly be clarified.

A considerable discussion of life crises ensued. National emergencies as well as local disasters can yield important information about human behavior and adjustment. At the same time, these may represent important choice points in development, times at which people are uniquely and sometimes dramatically accessible. It is important, however, to distinguish between accessibility and receptivity. Due to crises of one sort or another, parents may be a captive audience, but they are not necessarily receptive. Assuming the one

from the presence of the other may be wholly unjustified and may occasionally yield rather disappointing results.

Looking back on all of the foregoing discussion, one participant tried to map a bit of research strategy: We have been discussing three different things. Each of these involves a somewhat different level and method of research. Longitudinal research on the long-range effects of early childhood behavior is difficult to conduct and relatively impractical. Nor is the cost alone the major difficulty. Our theory is at present inadequate to deal with these problems, and what evidence has emerged from extensive longitudinal studies of outcome variables has not been too encouraging. The second idea being discussed is that regarding accessibility and receptivity. This is not easy research but it can be done. The third possibility is to study the more immediate consequences of certain kinds of parent and child behavior in order gradually to build a network of consequences and antecedents which, when it is sufficiently filled in, may shed some light on the long-range problem.

## PARENT EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

RESEARCH FINDINGS from numerous disciplines bear on the problems of parent education. The participants drew from a wide variety of studies in the course of the discussions to support or negate the notions being considered. Looking back over the material presented, a number of relatively coherent points emerge.

Many reasons were advanced for limiting the scope and objectives of parent education activities. Some of these stem from broad questions of social philosophy. Others issue from research which indicates the complexity of the process which parent educators are attempting to modify. Until we know more about the nature of this process, it appears wise to adopt limited objectives, those for which a clear consensus is available at present. For example, we know that there are wide differences between individuals at birth. Thus both parents and their children are differently constituted. It seems not only improper but naive and futile for parent educators to set out to "remake" their clientele, and worst of all to set out to inculcate all with some single value system which may be quite inappropriate for certain subcultures and classes. Perhaps the most realistic goal for these leaders is to help parents clarify and achieve their own objectives, taking due cognizance of the fact that these objectives may have to be modified when they are applied to individual children, with their unique genetic endowment.

### Problems Involved

Scientific studies have sharpened the focus of parent education. We have learned to distinguish between those areas in which ample,

solid research evidence is available and others where this is not the case. Thus, we have learned as much from what research has been unable to do as from what it has accomplished. All research in child development, for example, is not equally valid and findings cannot be employed by parent educators without an appreciation of their limitations and implications. A rather broad perspective of current research is equally vital to effective leadership in parent education. In spite of rather sharp criticisms of parent education from time to time, research has not demonstrated it to be fundamentally invalid.

Research allows us to view parenthood as a major role which has a degree of specificity. This permits efforts toward role alteration. But the problem is a most complex one. In the first place, the parental role is the result of continual interaction between family members. This means that role alteration involves more than one person, and may account for some of the disappointing results obtained where mother alone is reached by a parent education program. Furthermore, many factors other than interaction within the family cumulatively influence the development and the performance of the parental role. Patterns of parenting develop through the continuous acquisition and discarding of expectations about how both the child and the parent will and should behave.

We do not believe that research demonstrates a serious over-selling of our ability to help parents. It has indeed sobered us, especially with the recognition of the woeful inadequacy of our knowledge in certain areas. This, we hasten to add, is not the researcher's fault. There has been only limited communication between the laboratories of human development and professional parent educators. The latter have *selectively* utilized research findings, but there has been little feedback.

One reason why much descriptive limited-objective research has not emerged is that those who need to know such answers are neither inclined nor equipped to do it, and those who are, are neither interested in such questions nor aware that a need for the answers exists. Several institutions represented by participants at the conference are in the unique position of operating at both ends of the parent education program—social science research and “grassroots” activities in organized parent education programs. But even within such settings, communication is imperfect and the need for interlaboratory as well as interprogram communication is becoming increasingly vital.

Another reason why only limited “feedback” has occurred is the value put on pure as opposed to applied research. One participant felt that the child development research centers have become more pure research oriented, with limited objectives and restricted variables. They have become increasingly disenchanted with global studies of children. Such an investment of energy has resulted in a

greater dedication to pure research, with much more emphasis on theory and much less concern about whether what they are doing will have application or not. Research which either deals essentially with an applied problem or has no explicit theoretical framework is regarded with little interest by many workers. Research is, in a sense, self-limiting. Problems which can be dealt with, not only within a given theoretical framework but also within the relatively comfortable limits of the laboratory, tend to get studied, while others are, for varied reasons, excluded.

When parent educators turn to the researcher for help they generally pose questions which he is loathe to tackle. Evaluating the effectiveness of a parent education program, especially an established ongoing one, is a difficult job. It is all but impossible to do a clean job and come out with meaningful, uncluttered findings. Still this is one of the first ideas which parent educators associate with the word "research." Another problem high on the frequency scale is the very practical question of techniques. What should a parent do to achieve a desired result in the child? What is the best way to handle temper tantrums, eating problems, thumbsucking, and the like? Parents are eager for this kind of information. Yet these projects, too, are likely to be pushed aside for studies of the generalization of verbal habits, proactive facilitation, or similar "neat" laboratory studies.

## Research and the Future of Parent Education

During the course of the conference, a number of issues were raised which may have significance for the future of parent education. Some of these are summarized below.

It is generally assumed that in our complex and changing society of today, some type of institutionalized guidance for parents is necessary. Such an educational endeavor, whether one likes it or not, must have an underlying philosophy which both determines the objectives and goals to be sought and serves as a criterion for evaluating methods and procedures. Our public school systems handle this matter rather easily. Professional educators decide what dominant values are to be perpetuated and, after translating these into curricular units, proceed to implement their objectives. Such a positive "taking hold" of a situation would repel many parent educators. And yet the question of whose values are to be central refuses to be ignored. How democratic can we really afford to be? Most successful teaching programs result when a group of individuals survey the field of possible outcomes and then take a stand. This is not the place to elaborate, but it seems that this matter of goals and values is

becoming a central concern in the field of parent-child studies and will have to be faced squarely before very long.

The passing in 1939 of the National Council on Parent Education has been noted as a turning point in the entire movement. Since that time its visibility has steadily declined and it has been losing momentum as a special field of education. The process, once neatly defined, is now a part of the function of many workers. The responsibility for disseminating and interpreting information to parents is shared by members of many different "helping" professions. This broadened base has much to recommend it. The larger the number of professionals whose self-image includes the role of parent educator, the broader the coverage and the mightier the impact of the program. To speak of the importance of regaining identity for the field of parent education is not to suggest limiting its disciplinary makeup, but rather to suggest that more might be accomplished by heightening the awareness of those engaged in the process that they are, in fact, doing parent education. It was just this sort of coordinating and promotional function which the National Council served. Its passing has seen a breakdown in communication between the various agencies and individuals involved in parent education activity as well as considerable loss of contact with major research groups. Both of these losses have hindered progress to an unknown extent and should be recouped as soon as possible.

Finally, there is specific and immediate need for expansion and improvement of training opportunities for three types of parent educators. Two of these are linked in a sort of dependency relationship, namely, the professional parent education specialist and the lay leader. The assumptions underlying the use of the latter in parent education are still open to question and ought to be the subject of continued research. Certainly, the crucial factors are their training and the materials available for their use. Both of these, in turn, are the responsibility of the trained specialist. The last type is the professional worker trained principally in other areas—nurse, doctor, social worker, teacher—who works with children and families. These people constitute potentially the strongest corps of workers in parent education. Little has been done to enlist their cooperation and to give them inservice training. Many of them have never heard of parent education though they have played the role of parent educators many times. As this program is given increased visibility through effective leadership by professional parent educators and gains social approval because of its impact on parents and children, members of the helping professions will respond more and more to the opportunities it offers. The future of parent education hinges to a large extent on the successful involvement of these people in an interprofessional program of parent education across the Nation.

## VII

### PROBLEMS FOR RESEARCH EMERGING DURING THE CONFERENCE

THOUGH THE LIST BELOW represents but some of the research problems in the field of parent-child relationships, child development, and family interaction, these are the problems which emerged during the conference. They are assembled here for the convenience of the reader and student. Our report makes frequent reference to needed research, and we hope that the compilation which follows will encourage students of human behavior to undertake some of the work. We believe that further studies in these areas, among others, will contribute significantly to the effectiveness of parent education.

These gaps in our present knowledge were noted by the participants throughout the course of the discussions. Due to our informal procedure they appear in the main body of the report in somewhat haphazard fashion. Here we attempt to order them according to a number of rather broad classifications. Thus we hope that they may be of the utmost utility.\*

#### I. Role behavior and parent functioning.

##### A. Descriptive information is needed on:

1. Role behavior and prescription for parents.
2. Role expectations.
3. Parental duties and responsibilities.

##### B. Given the importance of role research, the following should follow:

1. Examination of the processes by which such roles are assumed, e.g., conscious and unconscious.

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\* The editor is especially indebted here to Dr. Irving E. Sigel who first suggested this compilation and then was kind enough to do the classification.



2. Study of the relationship between role expectations and general societal values (these social values to be examined with social class, ethnic, and religious reference).
- C. Given role adoption or assumption, questions dealing with role modification should be investigated :
1. How are roles, having been identified by society, modified or influenced by personal adaptations and incorporations of value systems?
  2. Study of role change as complicated by compatibility or incompatibility of role preference of the other spouse.
- D. Role assumption and expectancy may involve conflicts which should be studied :
1. Relationship between self-image and patterns of role, when the latter is incompatible with the former.
- E. Methodological issues :
1. Methods for improving the study of parental roles, e.g., obtaining adequate descriptive material.
- II. Ecological and demographic-type studies are also needed. Some of the following areas of problems are suggested :
- A. Family ecology :
1. Space facilities and arrangement.
  2. Sleeping arrangements.
  3. Place and type of environment the home is in.
- B. Family finances :
1. Influence of economic stresses and strains, e.g., living within the family budget.
- III. Family organization :
- A. Family structural determinants which might expedite the learning of new behavior patterns and child-rearing techniques.
- B. Parent behaviors toward children as a function of number of children, sexes, and ages.
- IV. Investigations dealing with the effects of parental behavior, and the content of parental practices :
- A. The problem of definition of the crucial aspects of the parental-child relationship needs further work.
1. Relative importance of parent's tone of voice and facial expression.

- B. The problem of parental changes through time.
  - 1. Some work must be done to assess the continuous acquisition and discarding of expectancies as to how the child should behave—related to this is the entire question of consistency over time of parental behavior.
- C. Significance of certain parental acts through time, regarding child development.

V. Personality studies of parents:

- A. Examination of characteristics and needs of parents.
- B. Accessibility of personalities to changes through education.
- C. Examination of the assumption that effecting salutary changes in the preparental social and emotional adjustment of individuals will have long-range significance.
- D. Study of the development of parent personality through time.

VI. Questions evolving around educational work with parents:

- A. Identification of those areas of child training more susceptible to educational direction than others.
- B. Examination of the content absorbed via educational channels and class status.
- C. Investigation of the degree to which attempts to alter parent-child interaction take into account the development of the interacting parties.

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